THE REPORT OF THE HANSARD SOCIETY COMMISSION ON ELECTORAL REFORM

June 1976

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PREFACE

The Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government exists to promote research, discussion and greater public understanding of all issues affecting parliamentary government. The Society noticed that recently there has been an increasing interest in electoral reform but that there was a need for an objective and comprehensive study of the case for and against electoral reform and of its possible impact on the British political system.

To this end the Hansard Society welcomed the creation of a Commission under Lord Blake and was pleased to be associated with it and happy to provide administrative facilities. The Hansard Society appreciated the calibre and the work of the Commission which, apart from Lord Blake, was composed of Sir Jack Callard, Professor Ralf Dahrendorf, Mr Miles Hudson, Mr Gwyn Morgan, Lord O'Neill of the Maine, Baroness Seear, The Rt Hon Richard Wood MP, Mr Peter Balfour and Professor J. D. B. Mitchell. Mr David Warburton of the General and Municipal Workers' Union originally agreed to serve, as did Mr Paul Rose MP, but both had to withdraw owing to pressure of other demands which made it impossible for them to attend meetings of the Commission. The Hansard Society would like to congratulate Lord Blake and all his colleagues for the tremendous amount of work they have put in preparing the report.

The Council of the Hansard Society has seen the report before publication and, since the Society exists simply to promote research and discussion, it does not either accept or reject the findings of the Commission which it has sponsored but merely commends the work to the public as a worthwhile contribution to the subject. This is eminently so in the case of this report and the Society hopes it will receive the widespread attention it deserves.

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission was set up in October 1975 with the following terms of reference: 'To examine the existing and any alternative systems of election to the House of Commons and possible systems of election for any devolved legislative assemblies that may be established within the United Kingdom and to report'.

The Membership of the Commission is as follows:

Member	Role/Affiliation
Lord Blake (Chairman)	Provost of The Queen's College, Oxford.
Mr. Peter Balfour	Chairman, Scottish and Newcastle Breweries Limited.
Sir Jack Callard	Chairman of ICI Ltd. 1971-75.
Professor Ralf Dahrendorf	Member of the Commission of European Communities 1970-74, Director, London School of Economics 1974-.
Mr. Miles Hudson (Secretary)	Political Secretary to Sir Alec Douglas Home (Lord Home) 1971-74, Director of Conservative Group for Europe 1975.
Mr. Gwyn Morgan	Assistant General Secretary, Labour Party 1969-72, Chef de Cabinet to Mr. George Thomson 1973-75, Representative for Wales of the European Commission 1975-.
Lord O'Neill of the Maine	Prime Minister of Northern Ireland 1963-69.
Lady Seear	Liberal Peer, Reader in Personnel Management University of London, London School of Economics.
The Rt. Hon. Richard Wood	MP (C) Bridlington 1954-, Minister of Power 1959-63, Minister of Pensions and National Insurance 1963-64, Minister for Overseas Development 1970-74.
Professor J. D. B. Mitchell	Salvesen Professor of European Institutions, Edinburgh University 1968-. (Professor Mitchell served

when the Commission considered possible forms of election to the Scottish Assembly.)

The Commission has studied the considerable amount of written material on the subject which is available including the *Royal Commission on Electoral Systems* of 1910 and the debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords in 1918 and 1931. The Commission has had written or oral evidence or has had the views of a large number of individuals and institutions including the following:

Organizations:

- The Electoral Reform Society
- The Liberal Party
- The United Ulster Unionist Council
- The Liberal Action Group for Electoral Reform
- Conservative Action for Electoral Reform

Individuals and their Affiliations:

Individual	Role/Affiliation
Professor H. B. Berrington	Department of Politics, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Mr. David Butler	Nuffield College, Oxford
Lord Carr of Hadley	—
Mr. A. Carstairs	Department of Modern History, University of Dundee
Jennifer P. Chapman	Department of Politics, University of Strathclyde
Mr. Brian Farrell	University College, Dublin
Professor S. Finer	Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration, Oxford
The Rt. Hon. Jo Grimond MP	—
Lord Hailsham of St. Marylebone	—
Mr. Eric Heffer MP	—
Professor A. King	Department of Government, University of Essex
Mr. James Knight	—
Mr. Norman Lamont MP	—
Mr. Nigel Lawson MP	—
Mr. Robert Newland	Department of Mathematics, City University
Professor Richard Rose	Department of Politics, University of Strathclyde

Professor B. Särlvik	Department of Government, University of Essex
Mr. Michael Steed	Lecturer in Government, Victoria University of Manchester
Mr. David Steel MP	—
Mr. Humphrey Taylor	Opinion Research Centre

The Secretary visited Bonn, Paris and Dublin and obtained the views of all the main political parties about their own systems in Germany, France (except for the Communists) and Ireland.

The Commission has had evidence of the views of the political parties about their own systems in Japan, Finland and India.

A report on the selection of candidates was commissioned from Mr. Terry Pitt. Research and secretarial assistance was given by Mr. Jonathan Roper and Miss Susan Hume respectively.

The Commission is most grateful for all the evidence it has had. Its Report is, of course, entirely its own responsibility.

CHAPTER I - THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

1. Government by the people presupposes in modern practice some form of representative government. This can take many forms, but common to them all is the idea that the legislative and executive powers of government are exercised at the top level by persons who are in some way chosen by, responsible to and dismissable by 'the people'. There can be much argument about who exactly constitute 'the people' but, as the franchise is not within the terms of reference of this report, we need not discuss it here. There can, however, also be much argument about how 'the people' choose and control the persons who exercise the powers of legislation and government. It is with this aspect of our political system that our report is primarily concerned.

2. Parliamentary democracy is not the only form of representative government. It is possible, as in the USA, to have a system under which the people choose by separate processes of election, a legislative assembly and also a supreme executive with great powers. For the purposes of this report, however, we have made the assumption that Britain will retain the concept of Parliamentary democracy and we have confined ourselves to the examination of electoral systems within that general framework.

3. Parliamentary democracies are themselves by no means uniform in pattern, but they have one important feature in common. The legislature not only passes, repeals, amends and rejects laws, but it also makes and unmakes governments. The government is upheld by a Parliamentary majority and resigns when that majority can no longer be maintained. The elector, therefore, while in form voting for or against a member or members of a legislative assembly is, in reality, voting in the hope that his decision is capable of affecting the nature of the government which will rule the country for the next few years.

4. In practice the electorate influences the political colour of the government coming to office as a result of a general election because voters are not normally voting for candidates as individuals, but as members of a political party which may or may not form the government. Political parties have often been condemned by purists, but there is no legislative assembly in modern times where they have not existed in some form or another. A political party in a Parliamentary democracy can be defined as a group of individuals formed in order to allow voters a practical choice of alternatives. Not every member of a political party, let alone every voter for it, supports

all the items in the party programme. But parties have now become a recognisable and definable part of the body politic and it would be unrealistic to discuss electoral systems without reference to their role and their own internal procedures for, in practice, whatever the abstract theory may be, the electors' choice is largely confined to candidates pre-selected by the political parties.

5. Representative government is based on the assumption that in some sense the legislature represents 'the will of the people'. Yet Parliamentary democracy is by its very nature an inaccurate mirror of public opinion. The spread is so wide that it is impossible to reflect every shade of view in Parliament. Whatever the electoral system, the voter will seldom be able to find a representative whose opinions on all issues at all times will exactly reflect his own. He must compromise by choosing someone who will be more likely to express his view than the other candidates offered to him: he cannot hope to find the perfect representative unless he stands himself! Moreover situations change. Even if it were possible for Parliament to mirror national opinion at the time of an election, there is no guarantee that it will continue to do so unless general elections are to be held so frequently as to make consistency and continuity in government policy virtually impossible.

6. Another aspect of Parliament is its role as the body which scrutinises the conduct of the executive, asks questions, expresses doubts and acts as a forum and focus for public criticism and debate. Few people would favour an electoral system by which a party which gained 51% of the popular vote got every seat in the legislature while the other 49% got none. An important function of a democratic system lies in the representation of minority views.

7. An important element in the consideration of Parliamentary democracy in Britain relates to the general acceptability of the electoral system. It would be illogical for those who believe in 'government by the people' to insist upon an electoral system for reasons of justice, exact representation, equality of voting power or any other concept however rational if, in fact, these considerations did not correspond with the wishes of the people, however irrational those wishes might be. It is difficult to say what the national will is on this matter; most people are probably not much concerned about the type of electoral system employed. Nevertheless some assumptions based upon political experience and common sense can be made about the likelihood of the acceptance of any new system, even if it is not possible to demonstrate their truth conclusively.

8. Most people in Britain believe in Parliamentary democracy. They

regard it as right that the complexion of the government should in some broad sense be determined by the electorate. They are probably not dissatisfied with the constitutional role of the House of Commons. They believe that the House should 'represent' public opinion and that in addition to passing laws it should be a place where a row can be made about errors, abuses, scandals, etc. They also believe that governments should not change every few months and that there should be a reasonable degree of stability. They are not entirely happy about what they feel to be the unnecessary party dogfight which has developed in recent times, with automatic opposition by each major party to a great many policies of the other; nor about the vast under-representation of the Liberal Party in the last two general elections—although few of them have a clear idea how either of these two situations can be changed or, indeed, whether it is possible to change them without undesirable repercussions. They like to feel that they have a Parliamentary representative to whom they can appeal although they may do so very infrequently.

9. Any consideration of electoral systems, therefore, if it is to be realistic, must operate within this general background.

10. In our view, it would be a mistake to attach overriding importance to the concept of the will of the majority in terms of a mathematical formula valid at all times and in all circumstances. On the other hand it would be absurd if an electoral system purporting to be democratic resulted in governments which pursued policies palpably contrary to the will of the majority of the people. It may be difficult, even impossible, to achieve rule by representatives of the majority, but it certainly does not follow that rule should be by representatives of the minority. We reject the thesis that equilibrium can be established through an alternating series of total dominations by rival and opposite minorities. This seems to us to be a recipe for instability of the most damaging nature. On the other hand, it is clearly necessary for governments to have the authority and power to govern for a period of years and to develop consistent and coherent policies without the constant risk of defeat in the House of Commons. An electoral system should, therefore, aim at a balance between these two requirements—the avoidance of rule by a minority and the achievement of efficient and purposeful government.

11. As we argued above, however, minorities must be represented and adequately represented. There is a difference in kind between a minority based on a particular geographical area (e.g. the Nationalists) and a minority which has some measure of support all over the country (e.g. the Liberals). By its very nature a minority

based on a particular area cannot have an overall appeal and its voting strength will be limited. Similarly, a nationwide minority may not be very strong in any one area. Both types of minority ought to find in Parliament representation which is not too far out of line with their inherent strength. We do not think it necessary to achieve total proportionality because that presupposes an electoral system sensitive to shades of public opinion to a degree which we have already discarded as impracticable. Moreover, there will be many minorities which cannot be represented at all if an election is to result in effective government under a system of Parliamentary democracy. There must therefore be some kind of threshold below which a minority does not achieve representation.

12. We therefore come to the conclusion that an electoral system in Britain should achieve the following general requirements:

(a) Governments should not be able consistently to pursue policies which are manifestly against the will of the majority.

(b) On the other hand, an elected government should be able to govern effectively.

(c) Sizeable minorities, either in terms of geographical area or overall strength in the country, must be adequately represented.

(d) Any system must be generally acceptable to the people as a whole.

CHAPTER 2 - THE PRESENT SYSTEM

General

13. Members of the House of Commons are elected in single member constituencies on the plurality system (more colloquially known as the first-past-the-post system) whereby the candidate with the most votes in a constituency is declared elected. The maximum length of a Parliament is five years, but the Prime Minister can at any time ask the Monarch for a dissolution leading to a general election. There is no case in recent history of the Monarch refusing, although constitutional lawyers of the highest authority agree that the Sovereign is not in all circumstances bound to grant the Prime Minister's request.

14. Although Ministers can be drawn from either the House of Commons or the House of Lords (and occasionally, although temporarily, from outside Parliament), the political complexion of the Government is determined by that of the House of Commons. Since there is no 'written constitution' defining the powers of Parliament, a government commanding a majority in the House of Commons can carry any measure it wishes. The House of Lords, being a non-elected body and thus lacking in authority, is seldom willing to use to the full even the limited power of delay which it still possesses, and the Royal Veto is as dead as Queen Anne, in whose reign it was last exercised.

The Franchise

15. The electoral register is compiled on the basis of residence every year on October 10, and is in force for 12 months from February 16 of the following year. Except for peers, lunatics and those serving prison sentences, all British subjects (and this includes Commonwealth citizens) and citizens of the Irish Republic, over the age of 18 normally resident in the United Kingdom at this date, together with service voters and merchant seamen, are eligible to vote in general elections. Voting is not compulsory.

16. The attainment of universal suffrage and one-man-one-vote has been a gradual process over the years since the Reform Act of 1884 which effectively enfranchised about 60% of adult males; there still remained seven different kinds of qualification, and plural voting was permitted for persons with more than one of them. The need to claim the franchise personally led to a low registration of voters.

17. The Representation of the People Act (1918) made local government officials effectively responsible for listing all persons legally qualified to vote. It also restricted plural voting to owners of business property and to university graduates (in 12 university seats). The vote was also given to women aged 30 and above, provided they were local government electors or the wives of such electors. Women were put on the same basis as men in 1928. The Representation of the People Act (1948) removed plural voting (university and business votes). The Representation of the People Act (1969) lowered the voting age to 18.

Method of election

18. The House of Commons throughout its history has in general been elected on the principle of plurality voting in territorial constituencies. The exceptions were the University seats which from 1918 to 1945 operated on the basis of the Single Transferable Vote, and thirteen large city constituencies which from 1867 to 1885 returned three members, each elector having two votes—the system known as the Limited Vote.

19. Before 1832 double-member seats were the rule. From 1832 to 1885 there were a certain number of constituencies with three members and one, the City of London, with four. There were also a number of single-member seats. As a result of the 1884 Reform Act the vast majority became single-member. This trend was continued by the Act of 1918, but 13 two-member seats remained in addition to the University seats. It was not until 1950 that all seats became single-member.

20. The view that the British electoral system has been sacrosanct over a long period of time and that any tampering with it is in some way to deny tradition is, therefore, not borne out by the facts. Indeed the system only endured in 1918 because of the failure by Parliament to agree on an alternative (see paragraph 70).

21. The principle of equality in the size of constituencies was not accepted until the Representation of the People Act (1918) although, even after that, the ratio between the largest and the smallest electorates was five to one. By the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act (1944) separate and permanent Boundary Commissions for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were set up. The principle of equality of size of constituencies has been qualified in four ways in the instructions given to the Commissioners: first, that "as far as practicable" administrative areas

should not be divided between constituencies; secondly, that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be given special treatment; thirdly that the Boundary Commissioners might depart from their instructions "if special geographical considerations including in particular the area, shape and accessibility of a constituency appeared to render this desirable"; fourthly, that it can depart from strict equality of size in order to avoid breaking 'local ties'.

22. In the case of Scotland and Wales, the Boundary Commissions are instructed that they should have a minimum of 71 and 35 constituencies respectively. This means that they are over-represented. Because Northern Ireland had a Parliament of its own, it is under-represented and is only allocated 12 seats. In October 1974, the relationship of members to electors was as follows:

Scotland one MP to 51,927 electors
Wales one MP to 55,798 electors
Northern Ireland one MP to 86,371 electors
England one MP to 64,634 electors

The Commission on the Constitution (Kilbrandon Commission) reported in 1973 that a strictly proportional allocation of seats within the United Kingdom would reduce the number of Scottish MPs from 71 to 57, Welsh MPs from 36 to 31 and increase Northern Irish MPs from 12 to 17.

23. As a result of the qualifications mentioned and of population movements between redistributions, the differences between the numbers of voters in English constituencies are considerable. For instance, at the election of February 1974, the first to follow the 1970 redistribution, constituencies varied from 96,380 (Meriden) to 25,007 (Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central). In England the average constituency had 64,077 electors but there were five over 90,000, 49 over 80,000, 79 under 50,000 and seven under 40,000.

Candidates

24. In order to stand in elections, a candidate must be presented by two members of the electorate and supported by eight others. On nomination, £150 in cash must be deposited by the candidate with the returning officer. This deposit is forfeited if the candidate fails to obtain one-eighth of the valid votes cast in the constituency.

25. The actual selection of a prospective Parliamentary candidate is made in the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties by the

constituency party. The mechanics of the selection process varies between parties.

26. The Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties maintain national lists of approved potential candidates although the candidate does not have to be initially selected from this list. In the case of the Labour party there are two lists—List A containing candidates nominated by trade unions and List B containing candidates nominated by constituency parties and other affiliated bodies.

27. In all cases a short list of potential candidates is drawn up. In the Conservative and Labour Parties the final effective selection is made by a committee of the constituency party (in the Labour Party, the general management committee; in the Conservative Party, the constituency executive committee). The candidate so selected will be presented to a subsequent general meeting which (in theory) has the right to reject him or her. In the case of the Liberal Party a final short list of three candidates is made by the Constituency Executive Committee and these candidates are then presented to a General Constituency Meeting, which selects one, who must be approved by the national Candidates Committee.

Election Results: Analysis

28. The results of all general elections since 1918 are given in Table 1, page 12.

29. Plurality voting produces a 'winner-takes-all' situation: the candidate with the most votes is elected regardless of how many votes are given to other candidates. All votes except those given to the winning candidate are, therefore, in one sense of the word 'wasted', indeed in 'safe' constituencies a high proportion of votes for the winning candidate are also 'wasted', since they have no direct effect on the result of an election.

30. In a predominantly two party situation, the system, as it operates in this country, works in such a way that a small swing in votes from one party to the other leads to a disproportionately large (but roughly constant) swing in seats.

31. In a three or four party situation, when the distribution of votes within constituencies becomes less uniform, the rule that a small swing of votes between the two major parties leads to a disproportionately large swing in seats is still true in general terms, although far more unpredictable in operation.

32. The first important conclusion to be drawn is that in the majority of cases, and in all cases but one (February 1974) since 1945, one party has in fact obtained an overall majority of seats in the House of Commons (Table 1, last column). Since 1945, coalitions between parties have, therefore, not been necessary.

33. The price for such apparent stability is to be found, however, in a number of anomalies. Whereas nine out of ten governments since 1945 were based on more than 50% of the seats, not one had 50% of the votes cast, and some as little as 46.4% (Con 1970), 46.1% (Lab 1950), 44.1% (Lab 1964), and even 39.2% (Lab, October 1974). Even more strikingly, in three out of the last thirteen elections (1929, 1951 and February 1974), the party which returned the largest number of MPs actually had a smaller share of the vote than the runner-up party in the House, so that in a sense the 'winner' was in fact the 'loser'. To take another example, the Labour Party obtained an overall majority in terms of seats at the election of October 1974, yet its percentage share of the total vote (39.2%) was, except for February 1974, the lowest percentage it recorded since 1935. By contrast, in 1951, Labour polled its highest percentage of the national vote ever, yet it was thrown out of office by the Conservatives with 200,000 fewer votes. It is of course true that the figures depend in part on the number of candidates put up by the political parties but, even if the number of votes per opposed candidate (see Table 1) is taken, the aberrations remain.

34. In terms of fair representation—the relation between the share of the total vote and the share of seats—the system clearly distorts considerably and creates rather peculiar thresholds. Distortion is most in evidence with respect to the Liberals. In February 1974 they polled 19.3% of the vote, or more than half the vote of either of the two larger parties, but gained a mere 14 seats as against 297 for the Conservatives and 301 for Labour. Nationalist parties which appear as third parties in Westminster are in a slightly better position, because in Scotland and Wales they profit from the very discrimination which militates against third parties with overall support.

35. There has been a marked decline in support for the two major parties in recent years (see Table 2, page 16). Whereas in 1951, 96.8% of the total vote went to either Labour or the Conservatives, this figure has fallen to 75.1% in October 1974. This decline has been accompanied by a rise in the support for the Liberal Party and for nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales. The Liberal vote rose from 2.5% in 1951 to 18.3% in October 1974, while the Scottish National Party vote rose from 0.1% in 1951 to 2.9% in October 1974 and Plaid

Cymru from 0.1% in 1951 to 0.6% in October 1974.

36. The system has been defended on the grounds that it produces strong government. It is argued that the bias in favour of the largest party ensures that governments have working majorities and can therefore govern effectively. This argument is based on the assumption that strong government is desirable and that it is more important than fair representation. We do not accept this assumption. We believe that fair representation is at least as important as strong government and that the present system sacrifices the former to the latter.

37. It is also argued that the system is simple and easy to understand. This is true, but simplicity is not the only virtue of an electoral system. A system which is simple but unfair is not necessarily better than one which is more complex but fairer.

38. The system has also been defended on the grounds that it produces stable government. This is true in the sense that it tends to produce single-party government, but it is not true in the sense that it prevents changes of government. Since 1945 there have been six changes of government, and in three of these cases (1951, 1964 and February 1974) the party which won the most votes did not win the most seats.

39. The system has also been defended on the grounds that it produces governments which are accountable to the electorate. This is true in the sense that governments can be voted out of office, but it is not true in the sense that the electorate can choose between different possible governments. The electorate can only choose between the candidates offered by the political parties, and the choice of government is effectively made by the political parties themselves.

40. The system has also been defended on the grounds that it produces governments which are representative of the electorate. This is not true. The system produces governments which are representative of the largest minority, not of the electorate as a whole. In October 1974, for example, the Labour Party won 50.2% of the seats with only 39.2% of the vote, while the Conservative Party won 43.6% of the seats with 35.8% of the vote. The Liberal Party won only 2.0% of the seats with 18.3% of the vote.

41. The system has also been defended on the grounds that it produces governments which are responsive to public opinion. This is not true. The system produces governments which are responsive to

the opinion of the largest minority, not to public opinion as a whole. In October 1974, for example, the Labour Party won 50.2% of the seats with only 39.2% of the vote, while the Conservative Party won 43.6% of the seats with 35.8% of the vote. The Liberal Party won only 2.0% of the seats with 18.3% of the vote.

42. Therefore, having measured the present system against the requirements which we suggested at the end of Chapter I (paragraph 12), it is our view that it does not prevent governments pursuing policies which are manifestly against the will of the majority. Neither does it guarantee that governments can govern effectively if by that is meant single party majority government. Sizeable minorities, in the form of parties with a general rather than a geographical appeal, are not adequately represented; and finally, although there is no conclusive evidence that the present system is unacceptable to the people as a whole, the decline in the votes for the two major parties over the last few years may indicate a dissatisfaction, however vague and incoherent, with the system as it stands.

Table 1—General Election Results, 1918-1974

1918. Sat., 14 Dec. (Coalition)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Un-opposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Coalition Unionist	3,504,198	335	374	42	32.6	—	47.38
Coalition Liberal	1,455,640	133	158	27	13.5	—	18.81
Coalition Labour	161,521	10	18	—	1.5	—	1.41
(Coalition)	**(5,121,359)**	**(478)**	**(550)**	**(69)**	**(47.6)**	—	**(67.61)**
Conservative	370,375	23	37	—	3.4	—	3.25
Irish Unionist	292,722	25	38	—	2.7	—	3.54
Liberal	1,298,802	28	253	—	12.1	—	3.96
Labour	2,385,476	63	388	12	22.2	—	8.91
Irish Nationalist	238,477	7	60	1	2.2	—	0.99
Sinn Fein	486,867	73	102	25	4.5	—	10.33

Others	572,503	10	197	—	5.3	—	1.41
Total	**10,766,5**	**7**	**1,625**	**107**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
21,392,3 8.9%

1922. Wed., 15 Nov (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Un-opposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	5,500,382	345	483	42	38.2	48.6	56.10
National Liberal	1,673,246	62	162	5	11.6	39.3	10.08
Liberal	2,516,285	54	328	5	17.5	30.9	8.78
Labour	4,241,383	142	411	4	29.5	40.0	23.09
Others	462,340	12	59	1	3.2	28.3	1.95
Total	**14,393,6**	**5**	**1,443**	**57**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
21,127,6 3.3%

1923. Thu., 6 Dec (Labour Minority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Un-opposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	5,538,822	258	540	35	38.1	42.6	41.95
Liberal	4,311,147	159	453	11	29.6	37.8	25.85
Labour	4,438,508	191	422	3	30.5	41.0	31.06
Others	260,042	7	31	1	1.8	27.6	1.14
Total	**14,548,5**	**15**	**1,446**	**50**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
21,281,2 0.8%

1924. Wed., 29 Oct (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Un-opposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats

Conservative	8,039,598	419	552	16	48.3	49.9	68.13
Liberal	2,928,747	40	340	6	17.6	30.9	6.50
Labour	5,489,077	151	512	9	33.0	38.2	24.56
Communist	55,346	1	8	—	0.3	25.0	0.16
Others	126,517	4	16	1	0.8	29.1	0.65
Total	**16,639,285**	**615**	**1,428**	**32**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate: 21,731,327 Turnout: 76.6%

1929. Thu., 30 May (Labour Minority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	8,656,472	260	590	4	38.2	39.4	42.28
Liberal	5,308,511	59	513	—	23.4	27.7	9.59
Labour	8,389,512	288	571	—	37.1	39.3	46.83
Communist	50,614	—	25	—	0.3	5.3	—
Others	243,266	8	31	3	1.0	21.2	1.30
Total	**22,648,375**	**615**	**1,730**	**7**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate: 28,850,876 Turnout: 78.1%

1931. Tue., 27 Oct (Coalition)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	11,978,745	473	523	56	55.2	62.9	76.91
National Labour	341,370	13	20	—	1.6	62.9	2.11
Liberal National	809,302	35	41	—	3.7	62.9	5.69
Liberal	1,403,102	33	111	5	6.5	28.8	5.37
(National Government)	**(14,532,651)**	**(554)**	**(686)**	**(61)**	**(67.0)**	—	**(90.08)**
Independent Liberal	106,106	4	7	—	0.5	35.8	0.65
Labour	6,649,630	52	515	6	30.6	33.0	8.46
Communist	74,824	—	26	—	0.3	7.5	—

New Party	76,771	—	24	—	0.2	1.9	—
Others	256,917	5	24	—	1.2	21.9	0.81
Total	**21,656,3[illegible]**	**615**	**1,292**	**67**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
29,960,076 [illegible].3%

1935. Thu., 14 Nov (National Government Conservative)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	11,810,158	387	585	26	53.7	54.8	70.09
Liberal	1,422,114	21	161	—	6.4	23.9	3.41
Labour	8,325,491	154	552	13	37.9	40.3	25.04
Independent	139,577	4	17	—	0.7	22.2	0.65
Labour Party							
Communist	27,717	1	2	—	0.1	38.0	0.16
Others	272,595	4	31	1	1.2	21.3	0.65
Total	**21,997,652**	**571**	**1,348**	**40**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
31,379,050 70.2%

1945. Thu., 5 July (Labour Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	9,988,308	213	624	1	39.8	40.1	33.28
Liberal	2,248,226	12	306	—	9.0	18.6	1.88
Labour	11,995,152	393	604	2	47.8	50.4	61.41
Communist	102,780	2	21	—	0.4	12.7	0.31
Common Wealth	110,634	1	23	—	0.4	12.6	0.15
Others	640,880	19	104	—	2.0	15.4	2.97
Total	**25,085,980**	**640**	**1,682**	**3**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
33,240,392 72.7%

1950. Thu., 23 Feb (Labour Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	12,502,567	298	620	2	43.5	43.7	47.68
Liberal	2,621,548	9	475	—	9.1	11.8	1.44
Labour	13,266,592	315	617	—	46.1	46.7	50.21
Communist	91,746	—	100	—	0.3	2.0	—
Others	290,218	3	56	—	1.0	12.6	0.48
Total	**28,772,671**	**625**	**1,868**	**2**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate: 33,269,780 Turnout: 84.0%

1951. Thu., 25 Oct (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	13,717,538	321	617	4	48.0	48.6	51.36
Liberal	730,556	6	109	—	2.5	14.7	0.96
Labour	13,948,605	295	617	—	48.8	49.2	47.20
Communist	21,640	—	10	—	0.1	4.4	—
Others	177,329	3	23	—	0.6	16.8	0.48
Total	**28,595,668**	**625**	**1,376**	**4**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate: 34,645,582 Turnout: 82.5%

1955. Thu., 26 May (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	13,286,569	344	623	—	49.7	50.2	54.60
Liberal	722,405	6	110	—	2.7	15.1	0.95
Labour	12,404,970	277	620	—	46.4	47.3	43.97
Communist	33,144	—	17	—	0.1	4.2	—
Others	313,410	3	39	—	1.1	20.8	0.48

Total	**26,760,498**	**630**	**1,409**	**—**	**100.0**	**—**	**100.00**

Electorate: 34,858,268 Turnout: 76.7%

1959. Thu., 8 Oct (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	13,749,830	365	625	—	49.4	49.6	57.94
Liberal	1,638,571	6	216	—	5.9	16.9	0.95
Labour	12,215,538	258	621	—	43.8	44.5	40.95
Communist	30,897	—	18	—	0.1	4.1	—
Plaid Cymru	77,571	—	20	—	0.3	9.0	—
Scottish Nat. P.	21,738	—	1	—	0.1	11.4	—
Others	124,640	1	31	—	0.4	11.0	0.16
Total	**27,859,260**	**630**	**1,536**	**—**	**100.0**	**—**	**100.00**

Electorate: 35,397,080 Turnout: 78.8%

1964. Thu., 15 Oct (Labour Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	12,001,396	304	630	—	43.4	43.4	48.25
Liberal	3,092,878	9	365	—	11.2	18.5	1.43
Labour	12,205,814	317	628	—	44.1	44.1	50.32
Communist	45,932	—	36	—	0.2	3.4	—
Plaid Cymru	69,507	—	23	—	0.3	8.4	—
Scottish Nat. P.	64,044	—	15	—	0.2	10.7	—
Others	168,422	—	60	—	0.6	6.4	—
Total	**27,655,363**	**630**	**1,757**	**—**	**100.0**	**—**	**100.00**

Electorate: 35,892,572 Turnout: 77.1%

1966. Thu., 31 Mar (Labour Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	11,418,433	253	629	—	41.9	41.8	40.16
Liberal	2,327,533	12	311	—	8.5	16.1	1.90
Labour	13,096,956	363	621	—	47.9	48.7	57.62
Communist	62,112	—	57	—	0.2	3.0	—
Plaid Cymru	61,071	—	20	—	0.2	8.7	—
Scottish Nat. P.	128,474	—	20	—	0.2	14.1	—
Others	170,569	2	31	—	0.6	8.6	0.32
Total	**27,263,668**	**630**	**1,707**	**—**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout: 35,964,684 75.8%

1970. Thu., 18 Jun (Conservative Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	13,145,123	330	628	—	46.4	46.5	52.38
Liberal	2,117,035	6	332	—	7.5	13.5	0.95
Labour	12,179,341	287	624	—	43.0	43.5	45.56
Communist	37,970	—	58	—	0.1	1.1	—
Plaid Cymru	175,016	—	36	—	0.6	11.5	—
Scottish Nat. P.	306,802	1	65	—	1.1	12.2	0.16
Others	383,511	6	94	—	1.4	9.1	0.95
Total	**28,344,798**	**630**	**1,837**	**—**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout: 39,342,073 72.0%

1974. Thu., 28 Feb (Labour Minority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Unopposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats

				Returns	Vote	per Opposed Candidate	
Conservative	11,868,909	297	623	—	37.9	38.8	46.77
Liberal	6,063,470	14	517	—	19.3	23.6	2.20
Labour	11,639,243	301	623	—	37.1	38.0	47.40
Communist	32,741	—	44	—	0.1	1.7	—
Plaid Cymru	171,364	2	36	—	0.6	10.1	0.32
Scottish Nat. P.	632,032	7	70	—	2.0	21.9	1.10
National Front	76,865	—	54	—	0.3	3.2	—
Others (G.B.)	131,059	2	120	—	0.4	2.2	0.32
Others (N.I.)[1]	717,986	12	48	—	2.3	25.0	1.89
Total	**31,333,269**	**635**	**2,135**	**—**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:
39,798,899 78.7%

1974. Thu., 10 Oct (Labour Majority)

Party	Total Votes	MPs Elected	Candidates	Un-opposed Returns	% Share of Total Vote	Average % Vote per Opposed Candidate	% Share of Seats
Conservative	10,464,817	277	623	—	35.8	36.7	43.62
Liberal	5,346,754	13	619	—	18.3	18.9	2.05
Labour	11,457,079	319	623	—	39.2	39.2	50.24
Communist	17,426	—	29	—	0.1	1.5	—
Plaid Cymru	166,321	3	36	—	0.6	10.8	0.47
Scottish Nat. P.	839,617	11	71	—	2.9	30.4	1.73
National Front	113,843	—	90	—	0.4	2.9	—
Others (G.B.)	81,227	—	118	—	0.3	1.5	—
Others (N.I.)[1]	702,904	12	43	—	2.4	27.9	1.89
Total	**29,189,163**	**635**	**2,252**	**—**	**100.0**	—	**100.00**

Electorate Turnout:

40,072,972 2.8%

Source: British Political Facts 1900-1975—Butler and Sloman

[1] For the 1974 elections, no candidates in Northern Ireland are included in the major party totals although it might be argued that some independent Unionists should be classed with the Conservatives and that Northern Ireland Labour candidates should be classed with Labour.

Table 2 — The Electoral Support for Major and Lesser Parties, 1945-1974

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mermaid xychart-beta title "Electoral Support for Major and Lesser Parties, 1945-1974" x-axis [1945, 1950, 1951, 1955, 1959, 1964, 1966, 1970, 1974] y-axis "Percentage of Vote" 0 --> 100 line [88, 89, 96, 96, 92, 89, 89, 88, 75] line [12, 11, 4, 4, 8, 13, 10, 11, 25]
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Conservative + Labour share of vote
Liberal + Other share of vote

Source: The Problems of Party Government—Richard Rose

CHAPTER 3 - SOME CHANGES WITHIN THE PRESENT SYSTEM

43. Consideration of electoral systems cannot be confined to the ways in which votes are cast and counted. Although that is the main problem, there are a number of other matters which demand attention, even if the first-past-the-post method is retained for electing the Parliament at Westminster. We want to emphasise, however, that our proposals in this field should not be mistaken as a substitute for other changes discussed in this Report, nor as being intended in any way to weaken our recommendations in paragraph 144.

Representation of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

44. As explained in paragraph 22, Scotland and Wales are over-represented and Northern Ireland is under-represented in the House of Commons in terms of seats to votes. Northern Ireland was deliberately under-represented because the territory had its own Devolved Parliament at Stormont. We do not agree with the premise that because a country has a Devolved Assembly it should be under-represented at Westminster, neither do we think there is any case for the over-representation of Scotland and Wales. We consider that, whether or not the system of election to Westminster is changed, the Boundary Commissions should be instructed to treat the whole country on the same basis.

Size of Constituencies

45. We think that the present discrepancy in the sizes of constituencies is unnecessarily large and that the Boundary Commission should be given an overriding instruction that no constituency should have less than half the electorate of any other at the time of redistribution, except for the Scottish Island areas.

Selection of Candidates

46. Democracy involves choice. We have already argued that, in spite of the possibility of independent candidates standing for election, the choice now confronting electors primarily involves a choice of party, not of individuals. The political parties nominate candidates and an elector who wishes to support a political party is restricted to the candidate or candidates his political party nominates. It is therefore very important to ensure that the candidate or candidates are the

considered choice of the political party's membership.

47. We do not believe that the present system of selecting candidates (paragraphs 25-27) makes certain that those candidates necessarily represent the choice of a majority of their own party's members in a constituency. It is true that selection committees may themselves be elected by the members of a party, but this is democracy at second-hand. We believe that party members should have a chance of exercising a direct choice.

48. Hitherto it has not been thought right to interfere in any way with the methods by which political parties select candidates. It has been argued that legislation on this matter is an affront to freedom. Our view, however, is that this limitation on freedom of association would be less damaging than the limitation on freedom of choice which the present situation involves.

49. We recognise that the right to select a party's candidate should rest with those who have sufficient commitment actually to join a party.

50. We also recognise that sitting Members of Parliament are in practice in a different situation from that of other possible candidates for election. They have a prior claim on their party's candidature and should not necessarily have to undergo the process of selection by direct choice unless a substantial proportion of their party's membership feel it is necessary. It would be wrong to insist on direct election in every case just for the sake of uniformity. At the same time, the Member's claim to be free to vote in Parliament according to his conscience implies the right of the party members to change their representative if his decisions are tending to be out of line with their views.

51. Problems of timing will clearly arise. If party members are to have the opportunity of direct choice of candidate, there must be sufficient time for the necessary procedures. We do not envisage anything on the scale of the American primaries, but any kind of direct choice of candidate by party members must take more time than a situation where there is no such choice. In the vast majority of cases party candidates will, in practice, have been selected before an election is called. In the few cases where a candidate has not been adopted when an election is called we think that a telescoped procedure would be necessary, which would still maintain the principle of direct choice (see paragraph 53(d)). **52.** We are aware of the many ramifications involved in moving to a direct choice of candidates, particularly on

points of detail. We also realise that the political parties will have strong views about them. Such views should, where necessary, be incorporated in legislation, but we are concerned that the principle of direct and effective choice should not be impaired.

53. One method of achieving our objective would be for the electoral law to be amended as follows:

(a) It will be permissible for a candidate to add a party political label after his or her name on the ballot paper only if a certificate is lodged with the electoral registration officer at the time of nomination by the chairman (or an agent appointed by him) of the constituency political party in question to the effect that certain requirements have been complied with.

(b) These will include the following:

(i) All registered members of the political party in the constituency must have had the opportunity to vote by secret postal ballot (financed from public sources) on the choice of candidate.

(ii) If only one candidate was named on the ballot paper, there must have been a clear opportunity to accept or reject him or her, with a proviso that if the candidate is rejected, the whole procedure will be repeated until a candidate is accepted.

(iii) The Chairman of a political party in a constituency must be responsible for maintaining a list of party members available for inspection at any time.

(c) Paragraph (b) (i), (ii) will not normally apply to sitting Members of Parliament. If, however, 20% or more of the paid-up members of the party sign a declaration to the effect that they require an election to be held, then (b) (i) and (ii) will apply, and the sitting member will have an absolute right to be one of the candidates.

(d) If a postal ballot is impractical, a secret ballot can be conducted by a political party with party members voting in person at constituency party headquarters or any other convenient place or places to be determined by the party.

54. We are aware that we have not elaborated all the points which would have to be covered in legislation on these lines and that, in particular, we have not dealt with the important matter of the legal definition of a political party. We consider, however, that our proposals would be considerably more democratic than existing

procedures and could be implemented without serious difficulty.

The Deposit

55. We think that the criterion for acceptance as a candidate for election should be based on a reasonable level of support in a constituency rather than on the ability to raise, and perhaps lose, £150. We therefore recommend the abolition of the £150 deposit and a considerable increase in the number of supporting signatures at nomination (the present number is 10). This would prevent frivolous candidatures while ensuring that any serious candidate would have no difficulty in standing.

CHAPTER 4 - SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST ELECTORAL REFORM

56. We now turn to the core of our terms of reference—electoral reform for the House of Commons.

The Case For the Present System

57. This has been argued to us on broadly the following lines:

(a) The present electoral system in Britain has on the whole worked well. It has led to stable government based on parliamentary majorities of one party rather than on coalition. It is familiar to the British people and generally accepted by them. Apart from interested parties and small pressure groups there is no great demand for change'

(b) The built-in 'unfairness' of the present system, i'e. its bias in favour of the 'largest organised minority', is more than compensated by the fact that it is precisely this bias which makes for strong government, capable of taking bold initiatives in a coherent and at the same time flexible manner. The price of a 'fairer' system would be the dissipation of such initiative.

(c) Indeed, it may well be argued that coalition government is intrinsically 'unfair'. It may, and often does, give small parties a power which is out of proportion with their electoral strength. The disadvantages of coalitions between parties illustrate the sound principle that it is better to have full power part of the time than part of the power all the time.

(d) One other major feature of the present system which has become an accepted and useful part of the British political tradition is the relationship between MPs and their constituents. Once elected, Members of Parliament represent, in a direct and often personal way, not merely those who voted for them but all their constituents, and thus provide an indispensable link between individual citizens and central government.

(e) Britain has many problems today, economic and otherwise, but there is no proof that any of them can be ascribed to the electoral system or its immediate consequences. In fact, discussion of the electoral system detracts attention from real issues of economic, social

and general policy.

(f) The cost of change would be high: inevitably, change is accompanied by many uncertainties. We do not know for certain what the effect of other systems would be, and there is reason to suspect that whatever advantages they might bring would be balanced by new disadvantages. Above all, experience suggests that there would be no way back; it is difficult to find convincing examples of reversals from greater to lesser proportionality, and easy to see in terms of vested interest why this should be so.

The Case Against the Present System

58. This has been presented to us as follows:

(a) The stability of government provided by the present system is more apparent than real. In three cases since 1945 new elections were needed within 18 months.

(b) While 'fairness' of representation is not the only, and perhaps not even the most important criterion of electoral systems, there is a threshold beyond which 'unfair' representation borders on the suppression of sizeable minorities. If and when 25% of the electorate no longer vote for one of the major parties, this threshold has been crossed and change is needed.

(c) More particularly, and whatever the case for the 'largest organised minority' may be, a democratic electoral system must protect the majority of electors, or at least of voters, from flagrant minority rule. For example if fewer than 40% of voters (29% of electors) can impose their will on the other 60% or more, distortions are no longer a question of 'fairness' but of elementary rights of citizens.

(d) The present electoral system is obviously in keeping with the tradition of adversary politics, by which the opposition tends to oppose the government on most, if not all, major issues and reverse policy when it comes into power. This tradition has, however, led to considerable instability as well as a tendency for the major parties to give undue weight to their extreme wings. An electoral system which makes possible a parliamentary majority based on less than 40% of the votes possible, has encouraged such developments.

(e) There is undoubtedly widespread disaffection with the electoral system. The clearest index of this is the fact that one out of every four voters now finds the parties favoured by the system unacceptable.

While there are arguments against the findings of opinion research in this matter, the fact is that in a recent (Marplan) survey, almost 60% of those interviewed, when told what the result of proportional representation would have been at the last election, said that they would have preferred this result to the one actually attained.

(f) The need to have direct elections to the European Parliament, as well as the likelihood of the creation of Devolved Assemblies, has raised the issue of electoral systems for public debate in any case. While there is no intrinsic reason why electoral systems for different bodies should not differ, arguments are likely to be raised with respect to new bodies, which are applicable to the existing ones also.

59. It is impossible to come to a final judgement on these matters until we have established whether there are practical alternatives to the present system which would satisfy the general principles set out at the end of Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 5 - THE CRITERIA FOR A NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN BRITAIN

60. The first principle set out in Chapter I (paragraph 12) recognises the need to avoid flagrant minority rule. Any system of parliamentary democracy involves government by compromise: the issues are whether compromises are made within one political party or within two or more parties in a coalition, and whether the political spectrum covered by a government is confined to that of one party or whether it should be widened, and if so in what circumstances.

61. Our second principle requires the establishment of a government able to govern effectively, and this must involve a compulsion to compromise within a government. It is arguable that this is achieved most effectively within one political party where there are elements of loyalty and a reluctance to be seen to be destroying a political structure built up over the years. These advantages are not present if compromise is sought between two or more parties. However this is not to deny that coalition government can be effective, or that the members of coalitions will strive to maintain the Government in office even if the task involves many compromises. Participation in a coalition government does after all allow any party a considerable influence over policies which it will not have if it is in opposition. Furthermore, there is always the constraint on irresponsible behaviour engendered by the fact that every political party must submit itself to the judgement of the voters at the next general election.

62. We are aware of the view that any system which may lead to coalitions may also give power to a minority party to determine the complexion of a government after a general election. It is said that this choice will be made, not by the electors, but by politicians in backstage bargains and wheeler-dealing in 'smoke-filled rooms'. We are not much impressed by this argument, because such a situation might well occur under our present electoral system anyway—indeed it did in February 1974. It may be better to have visible coalitions between parties than to have invisible ones between sections of one party. Furthermore representative democracy does, by definition, entail rule by elected representatives on behalf of those whom they represent: Parliament can even lead the country into war without reference to the electorate. A general election does not take the form of a referendum, and those who cling to a system under which in three of the last 13 general elections governments have been formed by parties with fewer popular votes than the runners-up, can hardly

argue that the voters choose the governments now. Nor is it obvious that a decision to join or not to join a major partner in a coalition must be taken in 'smoke-filled rooms'. A party could convene a conference after an election or it could announce its stance in advance.

63. On balance, we believe that single party government is preferable, provided that the party in question can claim to have something approaching majority support in the country. We are therefore of the view that an electoral system should maintain a slight, but definite, bias in favour of a single party government, but that this bias must not be so pronounced that one party can obtain a majority of seats on the basis of considerably less than 50% of the votes cast.

64. The third principle concerns the representation of minorities. Some systems of proportional representation allow for the representation in Parliament of a large number of small parties. We do not believe that this leads to stability of government. With a proliferation of political parties, governments may change with bewildering frequency according to the whims of small parties in a shifting series of rudderless coalitions. There should, therefore, be a de jure or de facto threshold beneath which political parties will not obtain representation in Parliament.

65. The present system, however, not only gives inadequate representation to a third party with a substantial minority spread over the country, e.g. the Liberals, it also under-represents the major parties in particular areas, e.g. the Labour Party in rural areas and the Conservative Party in the industrial areas of the North, even though there are hundreds of thousands of their respective voters in the safe seats of the other major party. We think it wrong that these minorities should have no Parliamentary representation, and we consider that a government formed by a major party should not lack the opportunity to include representatives of one or other of these two important elements of our national life. One objective of a change in the electoral system should be to improve this situation.

66. Our last principle is that any system must be generally acceptable to the people as a whole. There is, first, a strong tradition in Britain of a personal relationship between an MP and a clearly defined geographical area—in other words his constituency. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century MPs were primarily representatives of communities rather than of political parties or interest groups. Although the concept of community representation has largely disappeared, the personal relationship between an MP and his

constituency is a part, and a valuable part, of the British tradition, and we do not wish to see this changed. Any new system, therefore, should maintain this relationship. Secondly, although it is true that the method of election to the House of Commons has been changed frequently over the last hundred years we think that existing procedures should be tampered with as little as possible consistent with the achievement of our objectives: there is no virtue in change for change's sake. Thirdly, we are acutely aware that any changes may well have unforeseeable repercussions which may or may not be desirable. Fourthly, we do not believe that the people of Britain would wish to see the adoption of a system which would enhance the power of the political party machines: it may well be thought that they have too much power already. Finally, the simpler the system, the better.

67. We have therefore arrived at the following criteria:

(a) An electoral system should have a bias in favour of single party government, but this bias must not be so pronounced that one party may obtain a majority of seats, and more or less unlimited power for up to five years, on the basis of considerably less than 50% of votes cast.

(b) There should be a threshold which will exclude very small parties but those based on a feeling of national identity should be able to obtain seats even if their overall vote is low in percentage terms.

(c) If possible, any system should ensure that the major parties obtain some representation in areas where they have sizeable, but not majority, support.

(d) A close relationship between an MP and his constituency should be maintained.

(e) Any new system should be as simple, and should involve as few changes, as possible.

(f) While political parties are certain to continue to play an important and proper part, it is desirable nevertheless that the role of the individual voter should be enhanced.

CHAPTER 6 - ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS

68. During the last 70 years there have been several attempts to change the present electoral system. These have often received considerable support in Parliament.

69. In 1910 a Royal Commission recommended the Alternative Vote and suggested that municipal elections could provide a good opportunity for testing Proportional Representation with the Single Transferable Vote (STV).

70. The Speaker's Conference of 1916-1917 was unanimous in disapproving the first-past-the-post system. It recommended a mixture of multi-member and single-member constituencies, with STV for the former and the Alternative Vote for the latter. These recommendations were the basis for the Representation of the People Bill (1917). The two Houses were, however, in conflict, the House of Commons preferring the Alternative Vote in single-member constituencies throughout the country, the House of Lords favouring STV. After much dispute, the Commons agreed to abandon the Alternative Vote and to consider a compromise: and the Boundary Commission was instructed to produce a scheme for about 100 seats to be elected by STV. The House of Commons in the end rejected this plan, and the Bill lapsed.

71. The Labour minority government of 1929-31 tried to bring in the Alternative Vote as part of its Representation of the People Bill (1931). The proposal was criticised, both by those who wanted proportional representation and by those who were against any change at all. The Bill was carried by 50 votes on its third reading in the House of Commons, but it was rejected by the House of Lords and the Government fell before it could be pushed through under the provisions of the Parliament Act. The National Coalition Government which succeeded resisted all pressure for electoral reform.

72. Since 1945, (although there has been some pressure towards reform) no government has proposed legislation to reform the basic structure of the plurality system.

73. It has been estimated that there are at least 300 different electoral systems which either are, or have been, in use or which have been seriously considered at one time or another. Clearly it has not been possible for us to investigate all of these in detail but we have examined a considerable number and have, we hope, covered all the principal possibilities which have been suggested. We begin by

analysing the main systems which we have considered and rejected, before discussing what we believe to be the two principal candidates for adoption in Britain.

Single-Member Constituency Systems

74. Neither of the following systems sets out to produce a proportional result.

The Alternative Vote

75. Under the Alternative Vote the voter is invited to number the candidates in his constituency in order of preference (in the Australian Lower House elections it is obligatory to number all the candidates, but this need not be so). If a candidate gets more than 50% of the vote he is declared elected. If he does not, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated and the votes of his supporters are transferred to whichever of the remaining candidates they had marked as their next preference. If there are more than three candidates it may be necessary to repeat the process until one candidate attains a majority of votes over all other candidates.

The Double-Ballot System

76. This system is used in France for elections to the National Assembly as follows:

A first ballot is held for election to the National Assembly. If a candidate obtains an absolute majority of the votes cast, provided that this total equals 25% of the number of registered electors in that constituency, then the candidate is declared elected. If a majority is not achieved, a second ballot is held a week later. To be eligible for the second ballot, candidates must have obtained a number of votes equal to at least 10% of the total number of registered votes. If only one candidate fulfils this condition, the candidate who polled the second largest number of votes in the first ballot participates in the run-off. To be elected in the second ballot, a simple plurality suffices.

77. There are a number of possible variations concerning eligibility to stand in the second ballot: indeed for Presidential elections in France only the two candidates heading the poll in the first ballot can stand in the second.

Non-Proportional Multi-Member Constituency Systems

The Block Vote

78. Under this system there are multi-member constituencies in which each elector has one vote for each seat. The system is widely used in local government elections in Britain. It has also been used in Greece, Turkey and New Brunswick. It was used for Parliamentary elections in Britain in a few constituencies until multi-member constituencies were abolished in 1948.

The Limited Vote

79. This is a multi-member constituency system, but the elector has fewer votes than there are seats. It was used in Britain from 1867 to 1885 in 13 large city constituencies. It is used today in Gibraltar for elections to the House of Assembly. It allows minority parties fairer representation because, instead of putting up as many candidates as there are seats, they can, if they wish, put up only the same number of candidates as the elector has votes, thus ensuring that all the votes of their supporters are effective; whereas larger parties, hoping to win more seats, might put up more candidates, thus inevitably splitting their vote. The system also allows voters an element of choice between the candidate of their party (though only if the party in question puts up more candidates than the elector has votes).

80. Japan has adopted a similar system (the Single Non-Transferable Vote) but with each elector only having one vote in multi-membered constituencies.

The Cumulative Vote

81. This is a multi-member constituency system in which the elector has as many votes as there are seats, but he can split his votes as he likes. For instance, in a three-member constituency he can either split his votes three ways, or he can give two votes to one candidate and one to the other, or he can give all three votes to one candidate. The object of this system is the same as that of the Limited Vote—to give a greater chance of minority representation and an effective choice of candidates within a party. This system was at one time used in the Cape Colony. It is in use now for elections to the State House of representatives in Illinois and it was used for school board elections in England and Wales from 1870 to 1902, and Scotland up to 1918.

Conclusion (Single-Member and Non-Proportional Multi-Member Constituency Systems)

82. We have rejected all the systems in paragraphs 75-81. Most of them satisfy very few of our criteria and none meets them all. In particular none of them prevents flagrant minority rule. In the past the Alternative Vote has found some favour. One of its disadvantages is that it discriminates against whichever of the two major parties wins the larger number of seats where the third party is runner-up.

Proportional Multi-Membered Constituency Systems

83. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, politics in most countries of Europe became 'nationalised' in the sense that MPs were seen as representatives of broad political groupings rather than delegates from homogeneous communities. This tendency was reinforced by the widening of the suffrage and the emergence of Labour and Christian Democratic parties, introducing a new type of political ideology. The protection versus free trade issue of this period also cut across geographical communities and led to increased polarisation at national level. As a result of these and other factors, systems of proportional representation were introduced in the great majority of European countries and this, in effect, meant a move to multi-membered constituencies. One method of electing representatives from multi-membered constituencies involves the creation of a party list from which members are drawn in proportion to the votes cast for their party. This has, broadly, been the basis of the systems adopted in Europe, in Israel and in some other countries. There are, however, a number of variants: no two countries have precisely the same system.

84. First, there is the size of constituency. Israel is unique in treating the whole country as one constituency. All the others have a number of constituencies, varying in size (Holland has 18 constituencies but seats are allocated on a countrywide basis).

85. Secondly, some countries have a threshold either in terms of a percentage of the total vote or a percentage of votes in a constituency or both: below these, parties either obtain no representation at all or are discriminated against in some way. The size of the threshold varies from country to country.

86. Thirdly, the voter in a few countries has no influence on the order of the list which is determined by the political party in question. In the vast majority—and this is not always fully appreciated in Britain—the voter can have a greater or lesser influence on the order of the list (it is a variation of this latter system which is advocated in the pamphlet published by the Bow Group Easy as A BC—Electoral

Reform). Indeed, in Finland, the voter has total control over the order of the list in multi-member constituencies; the candidates who obtain the highest number of votes are elected.

87. Fourthly, some countries have a pool of additional seats in order to reduce any lack of proportionality still existing after the initial distribution of seats has been made.

88. Fifthly, the allocations of seats are made in a number of different ways, some giving more opportunities for small parties to obtain seats, others giving less.

Conclusion

89. It has sometimes been argued that the introduction of proportional representation leads to economic, political and social collapse. However this flies in the face of the evidence that is available: all Western European countries (except France and Britain) have electoral systems which are based on some form of proportional representation and their economic performances have in most cases been superior to ours. Furthermore, it does not follow that proportional representation necessarily involves a proliferation of political parties, instability or perpetual changes of government arising from shifting coalitions. This depends on the form of proportional representation adopted and, of course, on the social and political culture of the country concerned. The situation in France under the Third and Fourth Republics is often, wrongly, cited as evidence of the working of proportional representation. In fact, France has never elected a Parliament by a purely proportional system except in 1945 and 1946.

90. Certain List systems, and especially those which allow the voter a choice over the ordering of the List, have much to recommend them and, indeed, it can well be argued that they are more democratic than our present system because the voter can discriminate between candidates of the same party. However, if there is to be a multi-member constituency system at all, we believe that the Single Transferable Vote, which we will discuss later, would be preferable because it allows for the exercise of second or subsequent preferences when the first preference does not immediately secure the election of a candidate, or when there exists a surfeit of votes for one candidate. That system also has other advantages. Furthermore the Single Transferable Vote is not totally alien to this country (see paragraph 98).

Proportional Systems with a Single-Member Constituency Element

The West German System

91. Although the exact workings of the system are complicated (see Appendix 1) the principle is simple. Half the seats are directly-elected in single-member constituencies using the first-past-the-post system. The other half are distributed to the parties within regions in order to bring about the maximum degree of overall proportionality. A national threshold of 5% of the total vote or three directly-elected seats must be reached before a party can win any non-directly-elected seats.

92. We see a number of difficulties about the adoption in Britain of the West German system as it stands:

(a) The fact that only half the seats are directly-elected would mean that the size of existing constituencies would be doubled, unless the size of the House of Commons were to be increased.

(b) Candidates are allowed to appear on a party list without having stood for directly-elected seats.

(c) A national threshold might exclude a territorially-based party (e.g. the SDLP) from receiving seats in line with its voting strength. It might also encourage such parties to put up candidates all over the country to raise their percentage of the total vote.

(d) Parliament (the Bundestag) can vary in size (Appendix 1).

93. We therefore do not think that the West German system as it stands is suitable for adoption in Britain.

An Alternative System Suggested by Conservative Action for Electoral Reform

94. Under this system elections would take place as now within existing constituencies. The seats would then be allocated to each party according to their percentage of the total vote. This allocation would then be broken down into counties. Seats would be allocated to parties within counties on the basis of the candidates with the largest number of votes obtaining the seats. Although this is an ingenious scheme, some MPs would represent constituencies in which they had obtained a very small percentage of the vote. The 'loser' would

become the 'winner'. We are sure that this would not be acceptable.

Mixed First-Past-The-Post and STV

95. The country would be divided into areas each consisting of, say, ten of the existing constituencies. These areas would then be divided into, say, five directly-elected constituencies and elections would take place as now for those constituencies under the first-past-the-post system. An additional multi-member five-seat constituency would then be superimposed over the same area and contested under STV. Although far from proportional the overall result would bring a far greater measure of proportionality than exists now, and the five directly-elected MPs would retain a close association with their constituencies. This, again, is an ingenious idea, but a system of this kind would mean that two elections were taking place simultaneously —one under the first-past-the-post system and one under STV. This might result in considerable confusion and we do not think that it would be acceptable.

A Single-Member Constituency System with Additional Seats Allocated to Political Parties on a Proportional Basis

96. Under this system, unlike in West Germany, additional seats would be allocated in proportion to the total party vote, disregarding the results of the constituency elections. This would improve the proportionality of the end result to a limited extent, but not sufficiently for us to recommend it.

CHAPTER 7 - POSSIBLE SYSTEMS FOR USE IN BRITAIN

97. We now turn to the two systems which seem to meet all or nearly all our criteria—namely the Single Transferable Vote and one which we have described as the Additional Member System. The main difference between them is that STV involves multi-member constituencies whereas the Additional Member System allocates three-quarters of the seats to single-member constituencies with one-quarter used as additional seats to make the eventual result far more (although not fully) proportional.

The Single Transferable Vote

98. This sophisticated system has been successfully used in Ireland (since 1922), in the Australian Upper House (since 1949), Malta (since 1921) and Tasmania (since 1907). It was used for University seats in Britain from 1918 to 1948. It was also used in Northern Ireland from 1921 to 1929, for elections to the Assembly in 1973 and to the Convention in 1975. In the Republic of Ireland there have been two attempts to revert to the first-past-the-post system, but they were both defeated in referenda in 1959 and 1968.

99. The system involves multi-member constituencies in which each voter has one vote which can be transferred to other candidates. A quota of votes necessary for a candidate to be elected is established. The method of establishing this quota in Ireland is known as the Droop Quota. In a five-member constituency the quota is one more than a sixth of the votes: in a four-member constituency it is one more than a fifth of the votes and so on. The elector votes by indicating his first preference on the ballot paper, followed by subsequent preferences until he ceases to care about the order. If his first choice turns out to have a surplus above the quota or is excluded because he has the fewest votes at any stage of the count before the seats are all filled, the second, or subsequent, choices are transferred. The process is continued in stages until all available seats are allocated.

100. In Ireland, by-elections are held in existing constituencies under STV. In Malta, the ballot papers of the previous general election are re-counted, disregarding those cast for the retiring or deceased member.

101. The system has the great advantage of minimising the 'wasted'

vote. A high proportion of votes are used in order to elect candidates. The exact proportion of 'wasted' votes depends on a number of factors, including the number of seats per constituency and the number of voters who do not indicate subsequent preferences. But under any assumptions the voter must have a considerably greater opportunity to influence the election of MPs than he does under the first-past-the-post system.

102. The voter also has an opportunity of discriminating between candidates from the same party, or indeed of cross-voting: he can give his first preference to a candidate of one party and his second to a candidate of another. Parties can put up several candidates without much danger of splitting the vote, although this depends on an absence of cross-voting.

103. The system brings about a high degree of proportionality. Unlike the list system described above, seats are not allocated to parties in proportion to their votes but, depending on the number of seats per constituency, the number of seats obtained by parties is far more in line with their voting strength than under the first-past-the-post system. The system as applied in Ireland has been criticised on grounds of disproportional results. For instance in 1965 Fianna Fail obtained 50.3% of the seats with 47.7% of the first preference votes; in 1969 their first preference votes fell to 45.7% but they increased their share of seats to 51.7%. In 1973 Fianna Fail increased their first preference votes to 46.2% but their share of seats fell to 47.5%, so they lost power. However, these figures do not represent a telling argument against the system, because the whole purpose of STV is to allow later preferences to have an effect and it was these later preferences which led to the results. Indeed, in 1973, Fine Gael and Labour agreed on a coalition before the election and asked their voters to give later preferences to the proposed coalition partner and this undoubtedly had a profound effect on the result of the election. STV does, therefore, give voters an opportunity to endorse or reject coalitions which have been agreed upon by political parties before elections.

104. There are a number of other technical factors bearing on the results of STV elections: the way in which constituency boundaries are drawn—particularly in constituencies with less than five members; the extent to which votes become non-transferable when electors do not in fact mark their ballot papers below their parties' candidates; the normal 'wastage' of all alternatives votes for the runner-up candidate; and the extent to which parties tell their supporters to give their later votes to candidates of other parties. None of these factors, however,

although of interest to psephologists, are strong arguments against a system, which has produced reasonable proportionality and under which a stable situation has existed in Ireland for a number of years.

105. The system brings about a high degree of proportionality. Unlike the list system described above, seats are not allocated to parties in proportion to their votes but, depending on the number of seats per constituency, the number of seats obtained by parties is far more in line with their voting strength than under the first-past-the-post system. The system as applied in Ireland has been criticised on grounds of disproportional results. For instance in 1965 Fianna Fail obtained 50.3% of the seats with 47.7% of the first preference votes; in 1969 their first preference votes fell to 45.7% but they increased their share of seats to 51.7%. In 1973 Fianna Fail increased their first preference votes to 46.2% but their share of seats fell to 47.5%, so they lost power. However, these figures do not represent a telling argument against the system, because the whole purpose of STV is to allow later preferences to have an effect and it was these later preferences which led to the results. Indeed, in 1973, Fine Gael and Labour agreed on a coalition before the election and asked their voters to give later preferences to the proposed coalition partner and this undoubtedly had a profound effect on the result of the election. STV does, therefore, give voters an opportunity to endorse or reject coalitions which have been agreed upon by political parties before elections.

106. It is often claimed that one advantage of STV is to give the voter a chance to discriminate between candidates of the same party in terms of their political views. It is said that parties will put up candidates, for instance, to the right and left of their political spectrum thus allowing the voter to choose: or, for example, that parties would have nominated candidates both for and against Britain remaining in the European Community and so give a choice to the voters which they were denied under the present system. Although the opportunity exists, we are not fully convinced that this would necessarily happen in Britain. The selection of candidates will still be made by the political parties, and certainly in Ireland there is no conscious attempt to produce a slate of candidates across the political spectrum within a party and the emphasis is upon the personal/local links of the candidate or member. The system must also lead to competition between candidates of the same party within a constituency as they attempt to obtain first preferences: indeed, in Ireland there is no doubt that sitting members seek to influence candidate selection and in extreme cases a sitting member with great influence within a constituency organisation will attempt to keep out

equally able or more outstanding competitors. (See Garret Fitzgerald's Foreword to The General Elections of 1969 and 1973 by James Knight.) However, it does not follow that this would be the case in Britain with her very different political traditions.

107. The main problem about adopting STV in Britain concerns the size of constituencies. In no case has STV been used in a country with a population anywhere near that of Britain. There has been a move toward three-member constituencies in Ireland in recent years—at the last election, 26 of the 42 constituencies were three-member, 14 four-member and 2 were five-member. This has been achieved without any significant loss of proportionality, but there are only three effective political parties in Ireland. To have three-member constituencies where four parties exist, as in Scotland and Wales, would inevitably mean that the fourth, and to a lesser degree the third, parties would be severely hampered. Furthermore, it is precisely in the rural areas of Scotland and Wales that three-seat constituencies would be most desirable because of sparse population. But whether a system of three-, four- or five-seat constituencies is adopted the fact remains that in Britain constituencies would be large: a three-member constituency, which is the minimum, would mean an average of about 180,000 electors. It can be argued that this is not necessarily a disadvantage because a system of multi-member constituencies will mean that a high proportion of voters will be represented by a member of a party they voted for and will, therefore, have a Member of Parliament of their own party to approach when they need help.

108. On the other hand, others argue strongly that the retention of single-member constituencies is of great benefit to MPs because they do, in fact, represent all their constituents. But there must come a point when this relationship becomes so diffuse that its essential character changes. With modern methods of communication, including local radio, it is clearly possible to increase the size of constituencies without damaging this relationship to any great extent: the degree to which this can be done must be a matter of judgement. Constituencies in the United States are very large, but we are chary of making judgements on the basis of situations in other countries with totally different traditions.

109. There is no doubt that the close relationship between the member and all his constituents has been a valuable element in British political life. But in assessing its importance in relation to electoral reform it has to be remembered that the strength of this attachment varies very greatly.

110. If STV were to be adopted, constituencies should be drawn up by an impartial Boundary Commission which should be instructed to take five seats as the norm, only reducing the number of seats when geographical considerations make this essential (with STV, boundary changes could be less frequent because population changes could be met by adding to or subtracting from the number of members). By-elections should be held under STV within the existing multi-member constituencies—in effect with only one member to be elected this is equivalent to the Alternative Vote.

The Additional Member System

111. In arriving at this system, we have sought to combine the advantages of the single-member constituency with an acceptable degree of overall proportionality without incurring the disadvantages of the West German system which we noted at paragraph 92.

The system should therefore incorporate the following:

(a) Existing directly-elected constituencies should be increased in size as little as possible: the smaller the constituency the closer the link between MP and his electorate.

(b) Although there is nothing sacrosanct about the size of the House of Commons which has varied during this century from 615 to 707 and is at present 635, we do not regard a substantial increase as desirable nor do we believe that public opinion would sanction it. (c) All candidates should stand in constituency elections, thus submitting themselves to the verdict of the voter. (d) If there is to be a statutory threshold, it should not be on a national basis. (e) The size of the House of Commons should not vary. Within these limitations there are a number of factors to be taken into account.

Size of Constituency

112. Clearly the more directly-elected seats there are, the smaller the size of constituency. On the other hand it is important to have enough additional seats to allow a sufficiently proportional result.

Area in which the Distribution of Additional Seats is Made

113. The larger the area in which the distribution of additional seats is made, the fewer such seats are necessary to overcome the distortions of the first-past-the-post system. Additional seats could be distributed in a number of different ways: by county, groups of

counties or by regions. If distribution is made by region, East Anglia (the smallest) could be combined with the East Midlands in order to achieve greater uniformity of size.

The Threshold

114. The larger the area in which the distribution of additional seats is made the lower the de facto threshold which a small party has to reach in order to win them. A statutory threshold would overcome this difficulty, although we recognise that there are arguments about the arbitrary nature of a statutory threshold.

The Method of Allocating Additional Seats to Parties

115. Additional seats can be allocated in a number of different ways. The method we have selected (Appendix 2) gives a slight but measurable bias towards the larger parties.

The Method of Selecting Candidates for Additional Seats

116. We have decided to recommend that all candidates should stand for election in the directly-elected constituencies. Clearly those who win constituency seats will become members of the House of Commons. The next question is which of the remaining candidates will secure the additional seats. There are two main possibilities:

(a) The party could place all candidates in order of preference before the election. This could be done at a party meeting attended by delegates from all constituencies in the area in question. After the election, the available seats would be allocated as far down the list as necessary ignoring those candidates who had been directly elected.

(b) The voter could retain control: candidates could be placed in order according to their performance in the constituency elections. After discussing a number of possible ways of doing this we have decided that the best method would be to use as the determining factor the percentage vote they obtained.

117. There are advantages and disadvantages to both courses. We are in favour of the latter alternative because it avoids all traces of a party list.

Whether the Voter should have One or Two Votes

118. It would be possible for the voter to have two votes, one for the

candidate and one for the party. We consider that one vote which would count both for the candidate and for the party he represents would be better, because it is simple and easy to understand.

By-Elections

119. We believe that by-elections are a useful barometer of public opinion. These should be held as now for vacancies in directly-elected constituencies. Additional seats should be filled by the next highest candidate of the party in question at the previous general election who is available and willing to serve.

Conclusions

120. Having taken all these considerations into account, we believe that the best system for use in Britain is as follows:

(a) A House of Commons of 640 members with three-quarters (480) elected in single-member constituencies with the remaining quarter (160) being the additional members.

(b) The Boundary Commissions to be instructed to allocate seats to the English regions as currently defined by the General Register Office but with Greater London as a separate unit, and to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. (See Appendices 3 and 4.)

(c) The voter to have one vote to count both for the candidate and his or her party.

(d) The result of the 480 directly-elected seats to be decided under the first-past-the-post system.

(e) In order to redress the distorted results in the directly-elected seats, additional seats to be allocated to parties within the English regions and the other territories according to the formula at Appendix 2. A threshold to be set of 5% of the vote in any area of allocation, below which parties would obtain no additional seats in that area.

(f) In each area of allocation a party's candidates, who have not been directly elected, to be placed in order, according to the percentage of the vote which they have obtained in their constituencies. Additional seats won by parties to be allocated to their highest placed candidates. These candidates would be members for the regions/territories in which they have stood.

Measurement of Both STV and the Additional Member System against Criteria

121.

(a) Both would greatly add to proportionality while still retaining a bias towards single party government. Both would effectively prevent flagrant minority rule.

(b) Both would allow minorities adequate representation while excluding very small parties.

(c) Under both systems political parties would be represented in areas where they have considerable but not majority support.

(d) Under the Additional Member System, directly-elected MPs would retain a direct responsibility for their constituencies. We would anticipate that those members who were not responsible for constituencies would represent regional or territorial interests. Under STV, a high proportion of electors would have a constituency representative of their own party in the House of Commons.

(e) The Additional Member System would involve fewer changes in the present system than would STV: the single vote would be retained and 480 of the Members of Parliament would still be elected in single-member constituencies (the average size of constituency would increase from 64,000 to 85,000). Under STV constituencies would be much larger but would return several members each.

(f) Under both systems the value of each vote would be greatly enhanced. This would strengthen the power of the individual voter and give a new legitimacy to the parliamentary system.

CHAPTER 8 - ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND DEVOLVED ASSEMBLIES

122. Direct elections to the European Parliament are not specifically in our terms of reference. We have, however, found it impossible to consider the system of election to the House of Commons and to any Devolved Assemblies which may be set up without also touching on this matter.

123. One basic objective of elections to the House of Commons is to elect representatives from whom a government can be formed: this is not the purpose of elections to the European Parliament, at least in the foreseeable future. Therefore, those who argued that the first-past-the-post system is justified at Westminster, because it generally produces a government with a working majority, cannot apply this argument to elections to the European Parliament, which is intended to be a forum in which the political views of the populations of the member nations are adequately represented.

124. The European Parliament's proposal is that the United Kingdom will have 67 seats. Although this figure may be changed, the total number of seats is certain to be far less than the 635 at Westminster. This will inevitably involve very large constituencies: with 67 seats the average single member constituency would have an electorate of 600,000. Constituencies of this size would greatly increase the distortions of the present system. It is almost certain, for instance, that the Liberal Party, even with 6 million votes, would not obtain a single representative in the European Parliament. We believe that this would be indefensible.

125. We are therefore of the view that elections to the European Parliament should be conducted on some basis of proportional representation. If it is also decided to hold elections for Devolved Assemblies and the United Kingdom under some system of proportional representation, it would clearly reduce confusion to adopt the same basis for election to the European Parliament; but we doubt if this is absolutely essential and, in any case, the European Parliament is eventually drawing up "proposals for election by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all member states" [Treaty of Rome—Article 138 (iii)]. The system adopted for direct election to the European Parliament in Britain is unlikely to be precisely the same as that eventually adopted by all member states; but the possibility of eventual change in the system of

election to the European Parliament is an insufficient reason for keeping the first-past-the-post system until this happens. In any case we are clear that the adoption of the first-past-the-post system for election to the European Parliament would be inequitable and wrong at any stage and that it is essential to adopt some system whereby the spectrum of political views in this country is more fairly represented, as indeed is the case in every member state of the European Community except, arguably, in France.

Devolved Assemblies

126. The White Paper (Our Changing Democracy—Devolution to Scotland and Wales, Cmnd 6348) visualises Scottish and Welsh Assembly elections initially on the system of two Assembly members for every existing Parliamentary constituency with the two candidates with the most votes in each constituency being elected. "For later elections the Boundary Commission will divide Parliamentary constituencies as necessary into single-member Assembly constituencies, on a basis which will improve the fairness of the system by taking more account of the number of voters in each constituency. Each Parliamentary constituency will be allotted one, two or three Assembly seats according to a formula based on the average size of Parliamentary electorates in Scotland." These elections will be held on the first-past-the-post system. The Assembly will be elected for a normal fixed term of four years.

127. Both the majority and the minority reports of the Royal Commission on the Constitution 1969-73—Cmnd 5460 and 5460-1 (The Kilbrandon Report) recommend the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for elections to Devolved Assemblies.

128. The majority report argued (page 240) that the objection to STV on the grounds that it "tends not to give any one party a majority in the Assembly would be less substantial when the government was concerned with responsibilities in the domestic field only than would be the case with a government having to take important decisions on major questions of policy, for example in the fields of defence, foreign affairs and management of the economy, all of which subjects would necessarily be reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament and Government. An overriding requirement for the Regional Assemblies would, in our view, be to ensure the proper representation of minorities, and it would be no bad thing for a regional government to have to pay regard in the formulation of its policies and in its administration, to the views of the minority parties, or indeed to be obliged to seek a consensus with them. This would be particularly

desirable in any region in which there were likely to be long periods without alternation of parties in power. We, therefore, favour the Single Transferable Vote system, as the one most likely to give parties representation in proportion to their support in the region. Consideration might be given to the possibility of combining it with the use of the Alternative Vote system in areas of sparse population where constituencies would otherwise be unduly large."

129. The minority report did not argue the case so fully and confined itself to the following sentence (page 101): "There will be a single chamber assembly of about 100 members. They will be elected on the Single Transferable Vote system of proportional representation. This is so we can be sure that minorities will be fully represented—which is particularly important in those areas where recent voting patterns suggest one party could be in a 'perpetual' majority."

130. The Royal Commission, apparently, only considered three possibilities in any depth—the first-past-the-post system, the Alternative Vote and STV. It dismissed all other systems in one sentence: "Of the many other possible systems it has seemed to us that two—the Alternative Vote and the Single Transferable Vote—should be considered as practical alternatives". We have not taken this view.

131. However, we agree with the main thrust of the Royal Commission's report which is that, as far as Devolved Assemblies are concerned, it is particularly important that minorities should be more proportionally represented than is possible with the first-past-the-post system.

132. There are, however, other arguments of an even more compelling nature against the adoption of the first-past-the-post system for Devolved Assemblies. There is no doubt that, to a greater degree in Scotland and perhaps to a lesser degree in Wales, the issue of independence will be paramount over the next few years. None of the political parties in England questions the essential unity of the United Kingdom. There is at least a consensus in England on that point. No such consensus exists in Scotland or Wales. The consequences of a majority being obtained in any Devolved Assembly by the Scottish National Party or (very much less likely) Plaid Cymru on the basis of a minority of the votes cast are, therefore, much more serious.

133. Furthermore, if the first-past-the-post system for the Devolved Assemblies is adopted it will be very difficult to change it for some considerable time. If a Scottish Assembly were to have a majority of

SNP members devoted to partition, the resulting deadlock in the relationship between it and Parliament at Westminster would be total and most serious. We believe, therefore, that any electoral system adopted for these assemblies should prevent such a deadlock arising unless it is clear that there does, indeed, exist a majority in Scotland and/or Wales in favour of partition. This means some form of proportional representation.

134. As regards the actual system to be adopted, it would clearly be advantageous for elections to Devolved Assemblies, to Westminster (if any change is made) and to the European Parliament to be conducted on the same lines, although we do not consider this to be essential.

CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

135. The basic argument about electoral reform has often been presented in terms of two alternatives. Should the composition of Parliament reflect, as far as possible, the views of the electorate? Or should elections be a means of choosing a government with substantial, although not necessarily majority, support? The real issue as we see it, however, is to find a means of combining both fair representation and effective government. In a predominantly two-party system effectiveness and fairness may in practice be combined under the first-past-the-post system. However, when there are three, four or even five parties with substantial support the present system may well achieve neither purpose: the views of the electorate will certainly not be accurately reflected and it is very possible that a single-party government will not emerge from a general election.

136. In recent years the electorate has shown that it is not satisfied with the choice of only two parties. We note with interest that the Labour and Conservative parties in the House of Commons, when choosing between more than two candidates for the leadership, do not consider the first-past-the-post system to be suitable.

137. The aberrations set out in Chapter 2 have been tolerated in the past as the price of single-party government. However, in a time of increasing political polarisation, single-party governments without a considerable measure of overall support are neither strong, stable nor effective: indeed the question of the 'legitimacy' of government may well arise. Moreover in our opinion the 'threshold of unfairness' has been passed. The time has come to redress the balance towards a more accurate reflection of the views of the electorate in Parliament.

138. In Chapter 4 we set out the arguments which have been presented to us for and against reform of the present system of election to the House of Commons. In subsequent Chapters we examined alternatives, measuring them against our principles and criteria. We concluded that there were two systems which meet our requirements better than the present system.

139. We therefore advocate electoral reform.

140. Even if reform means that coalitions become more frequent, we do not see this as a major objection, as long as the system prevents a multiplicity of small parties. Political parties will still be answerable to the electorate. The avoidance of flagrant minority rule is, we believe, more important than any disadvantages which coalitions may have. Alternating single-party governments have during the last few years produced a series of abrupt and unsettling reversals of policy. An electoral system which makes this less likely might well be advantageous.

141. We believe that changes in the electoral system cannot be a panacea for the troubles which beset the nation. These stem from a complex mixture of deep-rooted historical causes which will certainly not be eradicated merely by electoral reform. Nevertheless we believe that the British electoral system has contributed to the present situation.

142. We appreciate that, although it is possible to foresee many of the repercussions of electoral reform, some of the consequences cannot be wholly predictable. It is of course also true that, even if the present system is retained, there is no way of predicting the future with complete accuracy.

Recommendations

143. We have made a number of recommendations which we believe should be adopted whether or not any change is made to the electoral system to the House of Commons. These are as follows:

(a) Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be put on the same basis as England for the purpose of the delimitation of constituencies (see paragraph 44).

(b) The present discrepancy between the electorates of constituencies should be greatly reduced (see paragraph 45).

(c) A system of direct choice of candidate by party members should be adopted (see paragraphs 46-54).

(d) The deposit should be abolished and replaced by the requirement of a much larger number of supporting signatures (see paragraph 55).

(e) Elections to the European Parliament and to Devolved Assemblies should be held under some system of proportional representation (see paragraphs 122-125 and paragraphs 126-134). A number of detailed

studies have been made as to how STV or an Additional Member System could be applied to the European Parliament. We can see no overriding reason why either of these two systems should not be applied to Devolved Assemblies or to the European Parliament.

144. As regards elections to the House of Commons, we are agreed that the present system should be changed and that either the Single Transferable Vote or an Additional Member System with 480 directly-elected seats and 160 additional seats allocated by regions in England and to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would represent a very considerable improvement. Lady Seear prefers STV but the remainder of the Commission prefer the Additional Member System as described in paragraph 120, although they are not dogmatic about the precise details.

145. We would conclude by emphasising that our basic recommendation is that there should be electoral reform. Whatever arguments there may be about the systems we have described, these should not be allowed to obscure our fundamental and unanimous decision.

APPENDIX 1 - THE WEST GERMAN SYSTEM

The System

1. The country is divided into 248 single-member constituencies. There are also 248 seats allocated by region (Land) to political parties in order to achieve an overall proportional result. The voter has two votes, one for the candidate and one for the party. After the votes are cast, the following steps are taken to determine the final result:

(i) All the second votes are counted on a national basis.

(ii) Using a variation of the formula described at Appendix 2 the parties, except those which have not achieved 5% of the national vote or three directly elected seats, are allocated the total number of seats they have won nationally.

(iii) The seats which have been allocated to parties are broken down in proportion to the votes which they have secured in each Land (region), using the same formula.

(iv) Seats are allocated to the 248 constituencies on the first-past-the-post system using the first vote.

(v) The number of directly elected seats which each party has won in each region is deducted from the number of seats which on a proportional basis they should have in each region: the shortfall is made up from a regional party list.

2. If a party has won more directly elected seats in a region than it has been allocated, it keeps the seats it has won. These seats are known as *uberhangsmandaten*. This happened in 1949 (CDU and SDP one seat each), 1952 (CDU two seats, Deutsche-Partei one seat), 1957 (CDU three seats) and 1961 (CDU five seats). On these occasions the size of the Bundestag increases accordingly.

Changes since 1949

3. There have been two changes. First, in 1949 the number of seats in each region was fixed: this is not the case now. Variations in turnout and the number of votes for minor parties which do not reach the threshold alter the number of seats in each region; although these changes will be small. The second change concerned the threshold. The 5% threshold originally applied to each region separately, the

alternative being to win one directly elected seat. A party now has to get an overall 5%, or three directly elected seats in order to qualify for additional seats (it naturally retains any directly elected seats it wins).

Candidates

4. The selection of candidates for directly elected seats is made at constituency level. Unlike the situation in Britain, however, the whole procedure is laid down by law in considerable detail. Directly-elected candidates have to be elected by secret ballot, either by all members of the constituency party or 'in an assembly' of representatives, elected from their own ranks by members of the party entitled to vote in the constituency.

5. A federal law lays down the constitutional status and functions of political parties, again in considerable detail. Independent candidates can stand for directly-elected seats, provided they are supported by at least 200 registered voters. Non-official parties can also put up candidates but again the procedures are carefully controlled.

6. There are similar detailed regulations about the party lists which are drawn up by the parties in the regions. In practice a very high number of candidates on the party lists also stand for directly elected constituencies. The parties are alive to the potential criticism if any of their candidates have not undergone the electoral process. Most of them are therefore very eminent men who have in the past submitted themselves for election and are well-known, like Herr Brandt.

7. The regional parties do not take at all kindly to direction from the central party machine. But the central party machines do bring some pressure to bear so that the list of candidates (the top five of each party appear on the ballot paper) represents a broad cross-section of the various interest groups and types of people. In practice no distinction is drawn in the Bundestag between directly elected members and those elected from party lists.

The Size of Constituency

8. Constituencies may vary only by one-third plus or minus the average; this has recently been guaranteed by law. In spite of that provision, considerable disparities remain—some constituencies are twice as large as others.

By-elections

9. There are no by-elections. If a Member dies, he is replaced by the highest unelected name on his party regional list at the last election.

Split Votes

10. It is quite usual for a voter to select a candidate of one party on his first vote and a different party on his second vote. This appears to apply particularly to the FDP. The results of the elections from 1957 to 1972 are as follows:

Year	CDU 1st vote	CDU 2nd vote	CSU 1st vote	CSU 2nd vote	SPD 1st vote	SPD 2nd vote	FDP 1st vote	FDP 2nd vote
1957	39.7%	39.7%	10.6%	10.5%	32.0%	31.8%	7.5%	7.6%
1961	36.3%	35.8%	9.7%	9.6%	36.5%	36.2%	12.1%	12.8%
1965	38.9%	38.0%	9.9%	9.6%	40.1%	39.3%	7.9%	9.5%
1969	37.1%	36.6%	9.5%	9.5%	44.0%	42.7%	4.8%	5.8%
1972	35.7%	35.2%	9.7%	9.7%	48.9%	45.8%	4.8%	8.4%

Invalid Votes

11. There are many more invalid votes in Germany than in Britain, although the number of invalid votes in Germany is declining. It is impossible to say whether this is due to the greater complexity of the voting process in Germany, to the greater rigidity of the electoral authorities, or to deliberate spoiling of the ballot paper. The figures are as follows:

Year	Federal Republic of Germany	Year	Britain
1949	3.1%	1964	0.15%
1953	—	1966	0.18%
1957	3.8%	1970	0.15%
1962	4.0%	Feb 1974	0.13%
1965	2.4%	Oct 1974	0.13%
1969	1.1%		
1972	0.8%		

APPENDIX 2 - APPLICATION OF THE 'LARGEST AVERAGE' FORMULA TO THE ADDITIONAL MEMBER SYSTEM

Method of Allocation

(i) The aggregate number of votes for each party within the area of allocation is determined.

(ii) This total is divided by the number of constituency seats already won by the party plus one.

(iii) The first additional seat is allocated to the party which now has the highest number of votes.

(iv) That party's original aggregate vote is redivided by the new number of seats which it has gained, plus one.

(v) The next additional seat is allocated to the party which now has the highest number of votes.

(vi) The process is repeated until all the additional seats have been allocated.

Example

An area with a total of 12 seats—9 directly elected, 3 additional.

Result of Area Constituency Election

Party A with 184,000 votes wins 5 directly-elected constituency seats
Party B 116,000 votes wins 3 directly-elected constituency seats
Party C 55,000 votes wins 1 directly-elected constituency seat
Party D 50,000 votes wins 0 directly-elected constituency seats

Allocation of Additional Seats

Party	Directly elected seats	Number of Votes	Divide by 1	Divide by 2	Divide by 3	Divide by 4	Divide by 5	Divide by 6	Divide by 7
A	5	184,000	184,000	92,000	61,333	46,000	36,800	30,667 (2)	26,286
B	3	116,000	116,000	58,000	38,667 (3)	29,000	23,200	19,333	16,571

C	1	55,000	55,000	27,500	18,333	13,750	11,000	9,167	7,857
D	0	50,000	50,000	25,000	16,667	12,500	10,000	8,333	7,143
		(1)							

Step-by-step Allocation Process:

1. **First additional seat**: Party D gets seat (50,000 ÷ 1 = 50,000) - highest average
2. **Second additional seat**: Party A gets seat (184,000 ÷ 6 = 30,667) - highest remaining average
3. **Third additional seat**: Party B gets seat (116,000 ÷ 4 = 29,000) - highest remaining average

Explanation of the Process:

- **Divide by 1**: Initial calculation (votes ÷ (seats + 1)) - Party D wins first seat
- **Divide by 2**: After Party D gets first seat, recalculate for remaining parties
- **Divide by 3**: After Party A gets second seat, recalculate for remaining parties
- **Divide by 4**: After Party B gets third seat, recalculate for remaining parties
- **Divide by 5-7**: Shows how calculations would continue if more seats were available

Final Overall Result

Party A 6 seats (5 directly-elected constituencies, 1 additional seat)
Party B 4 seats (3 directly-elected constituencies, 1 additional seat)
Party C 1 seat (1 directly-elected constituency)
Party D 1 seat (1 additional seat)

APPENDIX 3 - METHOD OF OPERATION OF THE BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS UNDER THE ADDITIONAL MEMBER SYSTEM

1. The Boundary Commissions should operate with a common quota for the whole of the United Kingdom, to be found by dividing the total UK electorate by 640. Seats would be allocated to the English regions, treating Greater London as a separate unit, and to Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland, by dividing their electorates by that quota, and rounding off to give a total allocation of seats.

2. In each area the Boundary Commissions would draw up single-member constituencies for three-quarters of the seats allocated, leaving one-quarter for additional members. Orkney and Shetland, and the Western Isles, would remain as single-member constituencies.

APPENDIX 4 - ALLOCATION OF SEATS TO THE ENGLISH REGIONS, AND TO SCOTLAND, WALES AND N. IRELAND UNDER THE ADDITIONAL MEMBER SYSTEM

The calculations are based upon the number of electors in each region or area on the day of the Referendum (5 June 1975).

English Region	Total Seats	Directly Elected Seats	Additional Seats
North (Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear)	36	27	9
North West (Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside)	75	56	19
Yorks and Humberside (Humberside, North Yorks, South Yorks, West Yorks)	56	42	14
West Midlands (Hereford and Worcs, Salop, Staffs, Warwks, West Midlands)	59	44	15
East Midlands (Derbs, Leics, Lincs, Northants, Notts)	43	32	11
East Anglia (Cambs, Norfolk, Suffolk)	20	15	5
South East (Beds, Berks,	111	83	28

Bucks, E. Sussex, Essex, Hants, Herts, IOW, Kent, Oxon, Surrey, W. Sussex)			
Greater London	84	63	21
South West (Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Glos, Somerset, Wiltshire)	49	37	12
Total	**533**	**399**	**134**
Scotland	59	45	14
Wales	32	24	8
N. Ireland	16	12	4
UK Total	**640**	**480**	**160**

*In Scotland, rounding-up is necessary to ensure adequate representation for the island areas

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